

AMERICORPS MILLIONTH MEMBER CELEBRATION

Remarks for Administrator Bolden

October 7, 2016

Welcome to NASA!

What an amazing group of people we have here today ... I truly believe that if your optimism and sense of purpose were rocket fuel, we'd have enough in this room to fuel a number of missions to Mars.

We're really happy to host you here at our Headquarters. You may have heard earlier in our program that here at NASA we have a vision that says in part: "*We reach for new heights... for the benefit of all humankind.*" I can't think of a group of people who exemplify this idea better than AmericaCorps service members – all of you, who have chosen to answer a calling in your own hearts to serve.

Please know that I speak for everyone here at NASA when I say that we are all so very proud of you and the work you are doing - and have done -- alongside one million of your closest friends.

This sort of mission-driven, civic-minded work and the training it provides is exactly the type of thing we look for when we recruit new members of the

NASA family. So we've signed on to be an "Employer of National Service" – answering President Obama's call to give a special look at the resumes of AmeriCorps alumni.

If you'll allow me this indulgence, of all the things we've accomplished at NASA, none gives me greater joy than the fact that we've been ranked the #1 best place to work in the federal government for four years and counting. I hope you'll keep us in mind as you consider the next steps in your own pathway of service.

Looking out across the room it is hard not to be inspired.

When I heard that roughly half of you are serving in schools, it immediately made me think of my mom and dad. My mother was a school librarian and my father was an educator as well as a high school football coach. They raised me to believe that there is no higher calling than the calling to serve.

I cannot help but also think of a friend of mine who has sadly passed away, but who I know is with us today in spirit. Some of you may recognize her name, Christa McAuliffe. Christa herself was an educator and she was set

to be the first teacher to go to space, before she died tragically on *Challenger*. Christa would have loved this event, bringing together two of her great passions: service and space. She is surely watching over us and smiling.

Christa once said that teaching allowed her to touch the future. No matter how you choose to serve your community and country, I hope you'll keep in mind that you are touching the future.

Show of hands, how many of you work with young people age 15 or younger? You are teaching the Mars generation; they have not lived a day of their lives – not a day – when human beings from different countries haven't been living and working together in space aboard the International Space Station. I truly believe that because of your own service, the day is not far off when a new generation of young people will say the same about Mars.

What's more, I also believe that because of your service today, we'll have a more peaceful and harmonious world tomorrow. Because of you, future generations will breathe cleaner air and drink cleaner water. Because of

you, more moms and dads will find it easier to put food on the table and send their own kids to college. More of your friends and family will live longer, healthier lives because of advances your generation will make in medicine. More of your neighbors from a more diverse and equitable array of backgrounds will be working the STEM fields of science, technology, engineering and math.

If you want to know why I am so optimistic about the future, I'll let you in on a little secret. You and your fellow Corps members have given me a million reasons. I'm optimistic because of who you are and also what you are choosing to do with your lives. I'm also optimistic because of the wonderful young people I meet as I travel the world as NASA Administrator.

When President Bill Clinton created AmeriCorps he talked about traveling the country. On the one hand, he saw wreckage, insanity and lost human potential. Yet, he said – and I quote: *“I saw even in the most difficult circumstances the light in the eyes of so many young people, the courage, the hunger for life, the desire to do something to reach beyond themselves and to reach out to others and to make things better.”*

You have presumably chosen to serve in AmeriCorps because this same desire beats in your own hearts.

As you reflect on your own path of service, I want to invite you to do two concrete things as soon as you can. The first is to visit the beautiful new National Museum of African American History and Culture just a few blocks from here. The second is to visit NASA.gov and view the stunning images of Earth that are being returned to us from NASA's Deep Space Climate Observatory or DSCOVR satellite.

Let me explain my recommendations ...

First, the museum: No matter what your background I think there's something to be said for taking a moment to remind ourselves that progress is often the product of hard work and struggle.

In the Jewish tradition, there's a saying that while it's not our duty to finish the work of repairing the world, this does not give us license to cease from trying.

In the space business, we have a saying: “space is hard.” We are closer today to sending human beings to Mars than anyone, anywhere at any time has ever been, because of people like Christa McAuliffe who gave their lives to make it so.

By the same token, the reason that we’re able to say that the International Space Station has hosted human beings for fifteen continuous years is that literally tens of thousands of people from 17 countries have been involved in its development and operations – each doing their own part so that all can benefit.

So with this in mind, I’m going to give you the same advice that my wife and I give our own children and grandchildren: Be bold, be fearless, dream big, and don’t listen to anyone who tells you can’t do something or you don’t belong. Don’t waste your time trying to explain yourself or your identity to anyone. Don’t feel like you have to justify why you are where you are.

When I grew up in Columbia, South Carolina, like you, I had a desire to serve. For me, the avenue of service that I most wanted to be a part of

was the military. It was my dream to one day attend the United States Naval Academy. The only problem was that I grew when segregation was the law of the land.

I was told in no uncertain terms that my Congressmen and Senators would not be willing to write a recommendation for me – a black man. So I wrote to Vice President Lyndon Baines Johnson asking for a Vice Presidential recommendation. When President Kennedy was assassinated and Lyndon Johnson assumed the Presidency, I figured that was it for me – until I received a recommendation from a Congressman from Illinois I had never met by the name of William Dawson.

I went on to attend the Naval Academy and had the honor of being elected class president by my classmates.

I never would have thought at the time that I'd go on to reach the rank of Major General in the U.S. Marine Corps. I certainly never imagined I'd become an astronaut let alone the first African-American Administrator of NASA, serving under our first Black President.

Why tell you all this? First so you won't be deterred when you reach your own obstacles in life or when folks tell you it cannot be done. Second, because it's important to me that I do not become the last African-American Administrator of NASA. The work that you are doing is a very important part of all this.

That brings me to the second action I invited you to take: to view those marvelous images of Earth I mentioned earlier on our NASA.gov website. I've been blessed in my career to see the Earth from space during four Space Shuttle missions.

If you look very closely at our planet, there is a sign that's wrapped around the Earth. It says, "Help wanted." (Not really!)

My hope is that as you consider how, in your own lives, you will answer the Earth's call for help, you'll be inspired by all that you do not see when you look at that beautiful marble of Earth: national borders; war; mass shootings; racially motivated hate speech; hunger; disease; the demonizing of our fellow human beings because of what religions they happen to

practice or where they happen to have been born or whom they happen to love.

One of the most remarkable things about these times is that the work that you do to solve these challenges is work that will ultimately impact both our quality of life here on Earth and also our out-of-this-world exploration of space.

You see, at NASA we're on a Journey to Mars. It's a Journey that will take human beings to the Red Planet in the 2030s. It's a Journey that we have no intention of tackling alone.

Frankly, we need each and every one of you.

Because every time a teacher inspires a student, it brings us closer to Mars.

Every time a parent reads to a child, it brings us closer to Mars.

Every time a doctor or nurse helps to heal a patient, it brings us closer to Mars.

Every time a scientist or innovator refuses to be patient when it comes to advancing new technologies, it brings us closer to Mars.

Every time a pilot takes flight ... every time a poet sets out to write ... every time a physicist enters a lab ... every time an environmentalist protects the health of our air and water ... every time an entrepreneur opens the doors to a new small business ... every time a human capital professional puts someone in a job ... every time a job seeker sends in a resume ... all of these things bring us closer to the day when the first boot touches the face of Mars.

The person whose foot will first touch Martian soil might very well be with us in this room today, or in one of your classrooms, or at one of your service sites.

So thank you all for all that you are doing to touch the future, reach for new heights and benefit your fellow human beings.